

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Regional Plan

Planning Region: Southern

Counties Included in this Planning Region: Kiowa, Crowley, Otero, Bent, Prowers, Baca, Las Animas, Huerfano, Pueblo, Custer, Fremont, Park, Chaffee, Saguache, Mineral, Rio Grande, Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla

A. As a Planning Region, complete the following questions:

- 1. Provide an analysis of the regional economic conditions, including:**
 - a. Existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations; and**

In the Southern region, changing economic conditions have created new areas of growth and opportunity in a variety of sectors and occupations. Currently, the region is dependent on exports in Manufacturing, Crop & Animal Production, and Government Services as major drivers of the workforce. This region faces many of the same challenges as other rural workforce regions in Colorado that have impacted regional economic conditions such as a downturn in the Oil & Gas market and a decline in the Agriculture industry overall.

The top industries for jobs growth in the Southern region in from 2013 - 2015 were Electronics (37% increase), Bioscience (14% increase), and Technology & Information (8% increase). Several of these industries employ relatively low job numbers compared to other expanding industries such as Health & Wellness (5% increase) and Advanced Manufacturing (8% increase). In these more specialized industries, employers can offer higher wages but these jobs generally require higher levels of education; in the Southern region, only 7.2% of the population has a graduate degree or higher, making these more specialized positions difficult to fill locally.

The Southern regional planning group's perspective is that most of these trends will continue over the next four years, with the addition of several new industries that will shift the workforce needs. The top in-demand industries and sectors in the Southern region are projected to be Health & Wellness, Hospitality & Tourism, Agriculture (including speciality crops), Energy & Natural Resources, Manufacturing, Construction, and Technology-associated industries.

Within Health & Wellness, the Southern region is experiencing an increase in its aging population, which is tied to the increase in this sector. As this population group grows, there will be an increased need for healthcare services including home care and in-office services provided

by low- and mid-level providers such as CNAs, MAs, LPNs, and RNs. In addition, there is a high need for physical and occupational therapists, addiction counselors, social workers, and case managers to assist individuals with navigating healthcare and behavioral health systems. There are difficulties with feasibility around private practices in this region due to increased regulations and administrative requirements, thus practitioners are shifting to employment by a hospital or health care system. This system infrastructure is dependant on more lower-level providers such as nurses, case managers, and medical assistants.

Hospitality and tourism is currently 3rd in the Southern region for the number of establishments in the region and this is expected to continue to grow. There is a high need for entry-level positions such as housekeeping, laundry, and mechanics - many hospitality partners have struggled to fill these positions for a variety of reasons including language barriers, lack of high school equivalency, or difficulties with employee reliability. The Royal Gorge Bridge is a major attraction and there are several more throughout the region and attract tourists year-round.

Agriculture has been a key industry in this region for many years and will continue to be an area of opportunity for workforce development. Through the rise in speciality crops, including marijuana and hemp, the region expects a revitalization of this industry. Local regional economic development professionals have identified hemp as a key industry and job provider over the next several years - efforts are currently focused around attracting these businesses to the region to provide jobs not just in agriculture, but also the manufacturing associated with product development such as personal care products, food products, rope, textiles, and home accessories.

Energy & Natural Resources has also been a key industry in the region, but with the recent downturn in the Oil & Gas markets, there is a cyclical impact that affects other industries such as Transportation & Logistics. Despite this recent downturn, the Southern region still expects this to be a major economic driver over the next four years, including expansion into natural energy sectors such as wind energy.

Manufacturing, including Advanced Manufacturing, is an important industry focus for the Southern region. Specialized positions such as industrial maintenance and machining are in high need across this industry and within a variety of sectors including agricultural product development and energy. Construction has experienced difficulties in the last several years due to the economic downturn, but this industry is poised for growth again due to the increased demand for housing across Colorado.

Finally, there is a rise in STEM-related industries and occupations, which is a consistent trend throughout Colorado. Programmers, developers, informational technology - all of these occupations are on the rise throughout the Southern region. Broadband infrastructure is an important component of the growth of these industries and is also tied to many other industries listed here such as Hospitality, Energy, and Manufacturing. Chaffee County and Pueblo have had successes in this area over the last few years, but several more remote areas in the Southern region still struggle with this infrastructure component. A La Junta communications company offers fiber to the business and home throughout most of southeast Colorado and they have

expanded to Canon City and Pueblo - they offer speeds ranging from 30 Mbps to 200 Mbps. They also offer wireless at 15 Mbps for more remote areas. There are several areas that also have underutilized infrastructure investments, so communities are exploring ways to utilize these existing resources for technology expansion purposes.

Other occupations that will be in high demand across multiple industries and sectors include finance and accounting professionals, engineers, supply chain, inventory management, transportation, and procurement positions at both entry- and professional-levels.

b. The employment needs of employers in those industry sectors and occupations;

Employers in the Southern region have needs consistent with other rural areas throughout Colorado: employees with basic professional and soft skills, employees with the ability to pass drug tests, and affordable housing to ensure they can attract and retain individuals.

The need for individuals, both young and mid-level, who have solid interviewing skills, a dependable work ethic, and the ability to interact successfully with a customer is always a need for employers throughout the region. Employers are willing and interested in working with their employees to enhance skills in this area, but there is a sense that a basic level of professional competency in timeliness, work ethic, and customer service is lacking amongst potential employees. Another concern and area of need for employers is that the training time is outpacing the demand - employers may be looking for more expedited credential training rather than the traditional Associates or Bachelor Degrees to get individuals hired and onboarded more quickly.

In addition, with marijuana legalization, employers continue to share struggles in hiring employees that can successfully pass a drug screen. For occupations within manufacturing and transportation where individuals are required to operate heavy equipment, this is a crucial component for insurance and liability management. Rural regions struggle with this issue for a variety of substances, not just marijuana, but with legalization, most employers are experiencing an increase in individuals who are unable to pass a pre-employment drug screen.

Finally, housing and transportation continues to be a challenge, with many employers sharing difficulty in hiring and retaining employees. There are many areas throughout the region where affordable housing is in short supply. In most areas throughout the Southern region, like the Upper Sub-Arkansas area, THERE IS DATA COMING. In the Southeast sub-area, there is also the challenge that the available housing in the area is often seen as sub-standard for individuals and families looking to move to the area. Lack of transportation in South Central and South East Regions is an issue for employers to hire individuals outside their residences.

2. Provide an analysis of the knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including employment needs in in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

As previously mentioned, there is a high need for basic professional skills such as customer service, dependability, problem solving, and work ethic that employers identified as a high need. In addition, with a rise in STEM-related occupations, math, science, and digital literacy skills will be needed to meet employer needs. This is important at all levels - not just postsecondary, but at the high school level: several manufacturing companies shared struggles with employees lacking math, science, and reading skills at the 8th grade level. Computer skills will also be important at all levels - basic digital literacy will be a key component as the majority of employers have job applications, benefits management systems, and time clocking systems that are all online. For entry-level positions with employers, there is a struggle with ensuring individuals have appropriate levels of digital literacy. For technology-related careers, expanding basic digital literacy into software programming and development will be crucial. Business acumen, including accounting, finance, and management skills are also applicable across multiple sectors and employers.

Healthcare-related knowledge and skills will also be an important focus for the Southern region, especially skills and credentials related to nursing, medical technicians, case management, and behavioral health. With this need comes the challenge of ensuring there are sufficient educational programs to support this growth as well as the job shadowing hours that accompany many of these positions. For example, Certified Addiction Counselors are in high demand in the Southern region, but the requirements of 1000-3000 job shadowing hours for a CAC I - CAC II are nearly impossible when there is a dearth of these providers within the region to provide that oversight. This presents a major challenge for employers looking to grow their own staff regionally instead of recruiting from outside areas. One strategy for the Southern region will be to advocate at the state level for changes to these requirements to make them more accommodating to employer and employee needs.

There is an increased need for vocational and career technical education skills in areas such as welding, machining, manufacturing, and other skilled trades. Though K-12 education has moved away from programs like this over the last ten years, the demand for these occupations continues to grow. Employers in manufacturing, transportation, logistics, healthcare, and agriculture all have a need for employees with these skills and are currently struggling to fill these positions. This will be a large focus of the Southern region's strategy - create partnerships between industry and education to provide these skills to individuals and keep them successfully employed in the region.

Employers in the agriculture sector will have a need for knowledge and skills related to regulations, especially as it pertains to marijuana and hemp, as well as business acumen and management skills. This sector also intersects with the need for manufacturing-related skills when speciality crops such as hemp can be used for product development. The efforts by workforce however, are very restrictive when it comes to the emergence of marijuana and hemp production - there are federal funding restrictions tied to these areas of development. As a result, workforce will not be able to support growth in this industry even if it is a regional focus.

In addition, there will be some industries that are lacking employees - the prediction for tourism is a shortfall of 100 employees within the next four years. Workforce centers will be creating more work at the local level to strategize ways to stay ahead of the demand curve for in-demand industries.

3. Provide an analysis of the workforce in the region, including current labor force employment and unemployment data, and information on labor market trends, and the educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment;

In 2015, the population of the 19 counties in the Southern region was 361,355, which is 6.7% of the state. While the state experienced a 7.5% growth rate, the Southern region experienced a 0.3% loss. Healthcare, Retail Trade, and Government were the top employers in the region. The unemployment rate was relatively low at 2.4%, but retail and healthcare experienced higher rates of unemployment with 13% and 10%, respectively.

With respect to education, the top program completions in 2014 were in healthcare, liberal arts, and business management. In addition, 14.6% had a 12th grade or lower level of education, 30.7% of the population had a high school diploma, 25.9% had some college experience, 8.9% had an Associate's Degree, 12.7% had a Bachelor's degree, and 7.2% had a graduate degree or higher.

As previously mentioned, the top industries for jobs growth in the Southern region in from 2013 - 2015 were Electronics (37% increase), Bioscience (14% increase), and Technology & Information (8% increase). Several of these industries employ relatively low job numbers compared to other expanding industries such as Health & Wellness (5% increase) and Advanced Manufacturing (8% increase). The average earnings across all industries was \$42,223, which is 70% of the national average.

There is also a large corrections presence in the region. Fremont County alone is home to 13 State and Federal prisons. ADX Supermax, the only federal Supermax prison in the United States, is in an unincorporated area in Fremont County, south of Florence. As of March 2015, Fremont County leads the nation among all counties as the one with the largest proportion of its population incarcerated, with 16% of people residing in one of the county's prisons. In addition, Chaffee, Crowley, Pueblo, and Las Animas Counties together have five state and two private prisons.

Despite a relatively low unemployment rate, the Southern region has several individual and systemic barriers to employment for individuals including a lack of affordable housing, a lack of child care centers or providers, transportation challenges (which will be addressed more in Question 9), homelessness, and substance abuse.

In Chaffee County for example, the average cost of a home is more than three times the average family income. The 2015 median income in Chaffee County was \$61,200. The 2015

Median Home Sales Price was \$289,000. The 2015 median income in Fremont County was \$52,000 and the 2015 Median Home Sales Price was \$157,576. In addition, a rent survey conducted in Custer County on 3/27/14 showed no units were available to rent. A follow-up study in January of 2016 showed two units available. This also impacts the construction industry in the region for their workforce development. There are also zoning restrictions throughout the Southern region that have prevented constructions companies and developers from starting new projects - the regional planning group discussed approaching local elected officials to impact these current regulations as a strategy over the next four years.

Child care is a consistent concern throughout Colorado's rural regions. The regulations and requirements for licensed child care centers and staff are high and the number of centers has dropped in the region because of this. Local human services agencies can provide limited assistance to families that qualify, but this does not go far enough to meet the need. If a parent is unable to secure affordable child care, they will not enter the workforce. In Pueblo, for example, the region could meet only 5% of the capacity for care for children under 2 years old. The increasing regulations on licensed child care facilities has caused many to close their doors, and these same regulations make the barriers to entry extremely high.

The region is faced with a high population of homeless youth, both local youth as well as transplants from other regions and states. In addition, the region has a high teen pregnancy rate and high levels of substance abuse among youth and adults compared to Colorado averages. From 2008—2010, live birth rates for women between the ages of 15-17 was 21/1,000 in Fremont County, compared to 16/1,000 in HSR 13 and 19/1,000 for the State of Colorado. All of these barriers create systemic challenges for employers who are unable to overcome these barriers for potential employees.

4. Describe the development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the planning region, and explain how sector partnerships will be utilized to facilitate the engagement of employers, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations, in workforce development programs.

Sector partnerships, both formal and informal, have always been a focus for rural areas of Colorado. The Southern region has several successful sector partnerships. One is the Arkansas Valley Manufacturing Group where manufacturing employers meet monthly to discuss trends, challenges, and opportunities and partner with the local workforce center to talk about ways to recruit and engage new employees. They also connected with the local school systems to create a career pathway program for manufacturing. One new strategy for this plan will be to connect with some of those manufacturing champions from Pueblo and have them travel to other, more rural areas in the region to support growth of similar efforts. The Colorado Workforce

Development Council has a new industry liaison to help increase coordination for efforts like this in other industries and will be helping to support this strategy.

One highly successful partnership to highlight was in the collaboration with WIOA Program Staff, Department of Corrections, Department of Human Services, Colorado Department of Transportation, and CDL driving test centers to support a recently released offender who had a job offer with CDOT, but needed to re-instate his CDL license. Within one week, the partners were able to work together to help the man take his test and then start a position with CDOT as a temporary worker. Within one month, he was promoted to a full-time employee. The CDOT supervisor was so pleased with the experience and the work ethic of the employee, they requested that workforce and DOC continue to refer individuals for hire.

Another successful sector partnership is between Pueblo Community College and the local hospital systems and palliative care centers. Recently, the CEOs met to begin discussing in-demand jobs and skill sets needed and how to encourage more partnerships with workforce to support this need. This partnership is also working to create a survey of all organizations in the region to understand emerging workforce needs and to explore creating a labor pool to share employees among each other.

Educational institutions are important sector partners, and Trinidad State Junior College has strong sector partnerships with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, workforce centers, and the judicial system. This allows TSJC staff to provide streamlined services and to connect their students to the resources they need to be successful. They have also partnered with several local franchises, including Taco Bell and Walmart, where those employers contribute financial resources to TSJC to support more employees in studying for and earning a GED.

Though facilitating the engagement of employers is crucial for the workforce centers, there continues to be challenges around having capacity to connect with employers as well as a perception of what a workforce center can provide to a business. For rural workforce centers with limited staff, it is often difficult to have staff out in the community talking to businesses because it would require closing the workforce office, primarily with offices with only one staff member. In addition, many employers have a mistaken perception that the workforce centers are solely for unemployment benefits, so marketing and outreach opportunities are needed to continue to engage employers.

One future strategy will be for the Southern region to engage the Small Business Development Corporations in each area. There are many small businesses throughout the region, as is consistent with national data on the presence of small businesses, so workforce center staff will be exploring new ways to increase outreach, marketing, and direct connections with small businesses over the next four years. This effort is also a focus of local Human Services staff, primarily for TANF recipients, so there are additional opportunities to utilize existing partnerships to increase connections with small businesses.

An additional strategy will be to coordinate the updating of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plans through the sector partnerships represented in the regional

planning group. This effort is an opportunity for partners to connect, collectively describe their individual community strategy, share drafts, and give feedback before submitting to identify areas for collaboration or joint funding.

5. Describe how career pathways will be used to meet the needs of employers and support work-based learning opportunities.

Career pathways and stackable credentials are an important components of the Southern regional plan. As previously mentioned, there is an increased need for vocational and career technical education skills in areas such as welding, machining, manufacturing, and other skilled trades. Though K-12 education has moved away from programs like this over the last ten years, the demand for these occupations continues to grow. Employers in manufacturing, transportation, logistics, healthcare, and agriculture all have a need for employees with these skills and are currently struggling to fill these positions. The Arkansas Valley Manufacturing Group recently began a program through a partnership with schools in the region to provide hands-on education and site tours for 6th - 8th grade students to introduce them to manufacturing as a career option and to help develop career pathways for these students. They raised \$50,000 in donations from community members and grant support to establish a physics curriculum using See The Change USA for all of these students. Las Animas, Swink, Rocky Ford, Cheraw, Wiley, and La Junta Schools participated in site tours.

In addition, at Trinidad State Junior College, there are several programs including but not limited to, College in Colorado and Find Your Passion where a Career Navigator assists students with developing career pathways. The Adult Education program is also working with the Colorado Workforce Center and the Youth to Work program where students who are seeking their High School Equivalency are paired with a Labor and Employment Specialist who help them with job readiness skills, resume help, and informational interviews both on campus and in the community.

The Chaffee County Department of Human Services utilizes programs called Choices and My Next Move to help clients assess their interests, skills, and values and match them with possible job options. They explore many areas and possibilities, learning what different jobs entail, the education required, the wages associated with those jobs, and the future trajectory and career pathways for various positions and industries.

South Central BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education Services) offers many of the same opportunities as others throughout the region. They spend approximately 30% of their time meeting clients personal needs so that they may then address the academic and career needs which encompasses the other 70% of time spent. They work in tandem with Department of Social Services, Pueblo Workforce Center, Catholic Charities, Pueblo Community College, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Health Solutions in providing basic personal needs from childcare, transportation, financial assistance opportunities, tutoring, academic counseling, mental health needs, Youth Works, and other agencies. They also help clients navigate mynextmove.org and collegeincolorado.org. SC BOCES also has a career notebook that lists various available careers to help clients see a bigger picture of what is available. They are now in the process of helping fill out FAFSA/College Entrance information to help students. Adult

Education does not work in isolation - they heavily rely on community partners to support the mission, improve the quality of life in the surrounding area, and to build a stronger workforce.

At Pueblo Community College, the faculty advising model allows staff to build relationships with students to help them explore and discuss multiple career options. The faculty come primarily from a business environment and can provide real information to students about jobs and career pathways. At Otero Junior College, all students are exposed through a three day orientation/discovery process where they are taken to all the departments to meet with faculty and staff to learn about different career paths. Advisors meet with every student four times each semester to review their academic progress and and if there are any changes to their career pathways. Within their nursing program, senior student mentor incoming students to help them understand career pathways (e.g. CNA to RN) and demonstrate crossover skills between departments and fields within the healthcare system.

The Pueblo Workforce Center is focusing on developing a talent pipeline to get information to the customer in the most timely way for the process to move quickly for them. This starts with a job ready review form, which the job seeker completes during registration and meets with a counselor to help them. Workforce staff also create a high-demand list of jobs in the area, which is used with the job seeker to identify if they can be placed in a high-demand area. There are Employment Solutions seminars, Career Exploration workshops, and many other resources to build resumes, practice job skills, or get tutoring to pass a test or secure a promotion. Workforce staff are also looking to expand into a programs like Career Cruising and Inspire, which integrate employers, workforce centers, and local schools to create demand pipelines and support career pathways for all individuals.

Workforce center staff have been a crucial component in developing career pathways for older workers and for workers dislocated by the recent oil & gas downturn. Several of these workers have had difficulty in passing entrance exams into other companies, either due to a lack of continuing education or from entering a new sector. Workforce center staff have been supporting these workers with tutoring and other services to not only help them pass exams, but to grow their skills so they can continue to grow within their new companies.

Career pathways are important in all fields, but local manufacturing companies are making this an increased focus for the next four years. Oliver Manufacturing, based in La Junta, employs around 60 individuals; their senior staff is thinking about ways to create career advancement opportunities to support promoting from within and helping existing employees navigate into other areas of the company. This is not only a career pathway for that individual, but it opens up a lower-level position for someone new in the community.

A primary need, and not just in the manufacturing industry, is math skills, both basic and advanced. Local workforce centers, postsecondary educational institutions, and employers, will be partnering over the next four years to explore strategies to increase math skills through tutoring, providing access to workforce center programs in the workplace, and adult educational opportunities.

6. Describe other strategies and services that will be used in the planning region to support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the planning region.

Meeting the needs of businesses is necessary for building a successful workforce development system. As previously mentioned, for rural workforce centers with limited staff, it is often difficult to have staff out in the community talking to businesses because it would require closing the workforce office, primarily with offices with only one staff member. One strategy to increase the workforce center's ability to meet the needs of businesses will be to design new educational and marketing options and designing workforce center staff time to be more flexible to meet with businesses and hear about their needs on a regular basis to encourage continuous improvement in this area.

Many local businesses focused on the need for ongoing and increased partnerships between all of the organizations in the Regional Planning Group. It's often difficult for businesses to be approached by several different government agencies for similar needs (job shadowing, internships, hiring, etc.). One strategy for this group will be to make business services within workforce centers more responsive and with easier access. One example requested by businesses was a structured account management strategy between all government agencies where the agencies coordinated their efforts to target businesses more strategically and make the communications more streamlined. This was echoed by the government agencies in the room who are interested in having state client management tracking systems more closely integrated with one another to create more of a one-stop shop mindset.

Another strategy to meet the needs of businesses is to create regional coordinated response/resource systems where businesses are more aware of how and where to refer employees for services to keep them employed (programs to help with child care, affordable housing, etc.). Employers shared that when employees face these social barriers to work, it's extremely difficult to keep them employed, but they also don't have the capacity to connect with and understand every governmental or non-profit service option that can provide support to individuals.

Employers also discussed an increased need for education around hiring individuals with higher barriers to employment - such as individuals with a disability, someone working to earn their GED, offenders, and individuals receiving social service benefits such as TANF or food stamps. There are many misperceptions about individuals that have these higher barriers to employment and workforce center staff can provide education and support for businesses to expand their hiring practices. In addition, there are also state and federal regulations which set maximum earning amounts for individuals receiving benefits. There is often a gap between working an entry-level or part-time position which allows someone to keep their benefits, but taking the next step up a career pathway would force them to lose benefits and the wages for that higher position do not fill the gap that benefits provided. If there were statewide strategies that supported an individual keeping their benefits for a short time in order to build up capital to support their needs, businesses could do more to create more career pathways for employees.

Most of these strategies require workforce center staff to have more time to connect with businesses however, which is a challenge mentioned previously for small, rural centers.

7. Describe efforts that have taken place or anticipated efforts to assess the need for and establish regional service strategies, including the use of cooperative service delivery agreements. In addition:

a. Describe the strategies and services that will be used in the planning region to better coordinate workforce development programs and services with regional economic development services and providers;

Regional economic development has a strong presence in the Southern region with many strategies and plans that are a natural area of partnership for workforce development programs. In Fremont County, there is an economic development focus on developing highways, tourism, and infrastructure plans for the region. Local businesses are sorting into “profit clusters” - one industry champion develops a cluster of businesses in that industry and they work with economic development staff execute plans to enhance that industry. This is a new effort being piloted this year, but this will create regional strategic efforts around industries and can partner with workforce to train workers in these industries and promote growth overall. In Custer County, the economic development focus is on securing stable, year-round employment with a focus on increasing tourism and hospitality industries with events such as Ride the Rockies. In Pueblo, there is a focus on the hemp industry, with a focus in product manufacturing such as car parts, fabrics, and building materials, although workforce center is limited in working with this industry. In the San Luis Valley, a \$25 million dollar facility is being built now for barley production - value-added agriculture is an important focus.

All of these areas have strong relationships with workforce centers. To further enhance the coordination of services between workforce and regional economic development, the agencies must continue to collaborate, especially when it comes to developing new economic development strategies and feeding that down to workforce to create pipelines for future employees. Another important area of coordination will be to bridge the gaps in expectations between employers and employees. For example, workforce could assist emerging agricultural businesses with identifying the right kinds of employees who will a good fit for the type of labor that is required. Economic development can support communication with employers about major barriers to employment in the region (e.g. transportation challenges) to promote a more flexible workplace or attitude towards employees.

The economic development partners in the region receive great value from the data provided by the workforce centers as it pertains to regional wage analysis, job trends, unemployment data, and other sources of information that impacts businesses and economic development. In addition, the regional planning group felt that there is a natural three-way partnership between regional economic development, workforce centers, and local human services departments and strengthening the coordination and relationships between these agencies will be a key strategy for the Southern region.

b. Describe how the planning region will strategically coordinate workforce investment activities with the provision of adult education and literacy activities under title II.

Workforce investment activities are a natural partner for adult education and literacy in the Southern region. This also connects strongly to career pathways - if students earn a GED, they are a natural audience for climbing the educational ladder, so it is important to communicate the availability of adult education and literacy programs in the region. One new strategy will be

at Colorado Mountain College - they are looking to increase digital literacy and computers skills in their GED program to assist in developing career pathways and student interest in continuing education.

A significant challenge with adult education and its coordination with workforce activities is the systems infrastructure, including broadband Internet access and IT systems, that is needed to ensure everyone across the region can access services. The Southern region for this planning effort consists of 19 counties and the rural nature of many of these communities makes transportation a challenge for individuals accessing services in-person. Several areas throughout the Southern region continue to struggle with Internet access or systems literacy, so enhancing technological and digital capacity of adult education and workforce will require the infrastructure to support job seekers.

There is strong, existing coordination between adult education providers, workforce center staff, and Department of Human Services (DHS) staff. This coordination can continue to improve, and one such opportunity is in exploring combining work-based training while individuals are in adult education to improve outcomes for participants. The workforce center also has provided, and will continue to provide, career fairs and other services to adult education students. DHS staff has also been trained to provide direct referrals to the South Central Board of Cooperative Educational Services for GED testing.

c. Describe how the planning region will strategically coordinate workforce investment activities with the provision of vocational rehabilitation services under title IV.

Workforce investment activities and vocational rehabilitation services have maintained a strong partnership in the Southern region for many years. This relationship will be enhanced when the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation relocates to the Colorado Division of Labor and Employment in 2016. In addition, there is a Lean event, co-sponsored by both agencies, to create new processes for workforce and vocational rehabilitation staff to interface client systems, share data, and create dual-use forms. There will also be a focus on creating more outreach and educational opportunities for businesses to learn about hiring individuals with disabilities; there is often a misperception that these individuals require a great deal of accommodation in the workplace, which is generally not true.

d. Describe the strategies and services that will be used in the planning region to strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs.

Currently, there is an effort underway to integrate the computer systems between unemployment insurance and workforce - when it rolls out in April 2016, workforce center staff will be able to see the occupation the worker was dislocated from so as to allow them to look for better matched opportunities. There was a request from adult education to develop a similar coordination between them and workforce. Again, an increased focus on marketing and outreach both at the state and local levels will allow workforce to educate employers about the difference

between workforce and unemployment insurance programs. This is often an area of confusion for businesses and job seekers.

Individuals that require assistance with an unemployment application are assisted through use of computers and staff assistance at the Workforce Centers. Additionally, the customer is provided information on how to apply for assistance on their own. Unemployment division has a designated “red” phone that is set up at the Workforce Centers and there are specific times during the week where a designated unemployment specialist staff member can speak with the unemployed customer if they have an issue that requires one to one interaction. Phones and computers are also available during the Workforce Centers business hours, Monday through Friday, for job seekers to use to call unemployment. Links to reemployment and future use of the RESEA has allowed staff to interact in a timely manner with individuals receiving unemployment and connecting them with the Workforce Center services.

It has been discussed and is being planned through efforts of the State job seeker Lean event that training and educating unemployment representatives would be conducted to help those representatives, working with individuals applying for unemployment, be able to better explain how working with the local Workforce Centers adds value to the individual in their job search efforts.

e. Provide a description of how the local board will coordinate workforce investment activities carried out in the local area with statewide rapid response activities, as described in section 134(a)(2)(A);

There have been many efforts around rapid investment over the last several years which will continue in the future. There is currently an exciting model of what a rapid response workshop will cover but they can be customized to the specific needs of the business and the affected workers. Workforce center staff has conducted several three-day bootcamps and on-site workshops for rapid response events, both in English and Spanish. Most recently, in January 2016, Haven Behavioral Health in Pueblo closed: 81 workers were affected. The local workforce center was contacted by the state rapid response team and the coordination helped to benefit the employees. The staff held workshops, went over unemployment benefits, had WIOA staff there to triage and enroll individuals in the program, brought consumer credit counseling partners, and shared Affordable Care Act and COBRA information. Workforce Center staff report to the local board during their Board meetings on rapid response efforts and results.

Healthcare organizations in the region also worked with workforce center staff to coordinate efforts to share resumes to each other and to partners and colleagues throughout the region to assist placing individuals in a rapid response situation.

8. Provide a description of the replicated cooperative agreements (as defined in section 107(d)(11)) between the local board or other local entities described in section 101(a)(11)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11)(B)) and the local office of a designated State agency or designated State unit administering programs carried out under title I of such Act (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.) (other than

section 112 or part C of that title (29 U.S.C. 732, 741) and subject to section 121(f) in accordance with section 101(a)(11) of such Act (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11)) with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts at cooperation, collaboration, and coordination;

As previously mentioned, the relationship between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Colorado Division of Labor and Employment will be enhanced by the agencies moving under the same system in 2016. In addition, the local process action teams are focusing on cross-training staff and planning for future needs by eliminating duplication and connecting staff to integrated systems and customer databases and will result in coordinated efforts and knowledge of ways to better serve individuals with barriers. DVR staff will develop a training for the business services workforce center staff to assist with cross-promotion of services. This will enable those staff members to speak about vocational rehabilitation services when meeting businesses to market both programs simultaneously.

The unemployment rate was 4.9% in Pueblo but for individuals with disabilities, it was closer to 13%. This illustrates the significant challenges in the region in providing services to individuals with disabilities and helping them enter the workforce. Employer attitude is a major barrier to increase hiring for these individuals, but the increased coordination with workforce can help this by being able to communicate with more businesses about the benefits of this program.

However, in this region, there are eight counties without a workforce presence, so this cross-training becomes harder and requires more creativity. There needs to be intentional strategic ability of workforce centers to respond, but these counties have significant challenges.

9. If determined appropriate by the planning region, describe the coordination of transportation and other supportive services or discuss why these are not appropriate for the planning region at this time.

Transportation is a significant challenge for the workforce in the Southern region. There are several local efforts, but there are many barriers to a coordinated regional solution. This is also a focus for expansion of the Tourism and Hospitality sectors - having public transportation options for visitors is a key factor for increasing tourism. This is also important for offenders - when offenders are released back into the community, they rarely have transportation of their own and thus rely on public transportation options when looking for work.

Pueblo is one of the larger areas in the region and has several local bus lines throughout the city, though several areas are still disconnected from those services. The airport industrial park in Pueblo, for example, is not located within the city limits so there are no bus lines that run there to transport workers. The local economic development staff are hoping to work with workforce and other programs to collect data about expanding this bus route to support workers that need that transportation option.

Chaffee County now has its own internal local community bus (the Chaffee shuttle) funded by federal general public transit funds and community matching funds. The bus has a daily schedule - workers can call ahead and schedule rides in advance. The county is working on

a plan to develop this into a full-time flexible schedule to be responsive to the small community and allow flexibility for routes when needed. The economic development staff also recently hired a student intern in Chaffee County that is working on a plan to improve intercity systems. There is also a bus line out of Gunnison that runs through Chaffee County to Denver daily, which allows for more commuters to the Front Range. The Chaffee Shuttle also provides daily intercity service to Pueblo passing through Canon City. Canon City provides a regional on-demand, shuttle service powered by donations and Federal general public transit funds. In Custer County, the Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments provided a bus to the local rotary, which staffs the bus with volunteer drivers. This service is also funded through Federal general public transit funds and local contributions. Though these systems are beneficial to the region, they are impossible to maintain without subsidies and volunteer drivers. Due to a lack of funding and transportation investment in the region, it is difficult to image a coordinated regional solution.

Though there are significant barriers, the regional planning group is exploring several ideas to expand transportation services including partnerships with school districts to utilize school buses, working with local rafting and outdoor recreation providers to share busses and shuttles, and expanding local ride-sharing services. There is also discussion of leveraging the buying strength of a larger region by combining resources to move towards a coordinated regional solution.

10. If determined appropriate by the planning region, describe how administrative cost arrangements have been coordinated, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs or discuss why these are not appropriate for the planning region at this time.

In Trinidad the workforce center, Trinidad State Junior College and vocational rehabilitation are co-located through a formal agreement. The Pueblo workforce center also coordinates with unemployment insurance to provide hotline access to individuals receiving benefits several days a week. The Pueblo County Department of Social Services also participates in a cost-sharing agreement with the workforce center to share workspace and provides cross-training of staff to increase coordination of services.

One new strategy will be for workforce and other partners such as adult education and human services to pool funds to share testing and assessment licenses. One additional step would be for the state to coordinate assessments between agencies to move towards a system where agencies all share the same testing and assessment tools. An additional strategy is to coordinate TANF assessment forms with workforce comprehensive assessments - if the agencies could combine their forms, this could reduce duplication.

Finally, if data systems and client databases can be integrated or shared between government agencies on a state level, this could increase coordination and administrative cost arrangements since staff would have access to the same information about a client.

Currently there is no mandate to pool administrative funds as this is being postponed for at least one year. Planning will continue this year with mandated partners and as the value and synergy of working together is better realized there will be new initiatives where agencies will begin to share in those costs. Building a collaborative workforce system will result in the willingness to support the value of working together and identifying ways to improve the system for job seeking and business customers.

- 11. The establishment of an agreement concerning how the planning region will collectively negotiate and reach agreement with the Governor on local levels of performance for, and report on, the performance accountability measures described in WIOA sec. 116(c) for local areas or the planning region.**
- 12. Provide a description of how one-stop centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system for programs carried out under this Act and programs carried out by one-stop partners.**

One-stop centers, literally speaking, have been discussed locally for several years, and while the idea would benefit customers, it is difficult logistically challenging for rural agencies to create this system because of the broad geographic nature of the region and the burden that places on individuals looking to access the system. Although there isn't a complete one-stop center in the Southern region, there are several steps being taken to create a coordinated system through data sharing and technological enhancements.

Currently DHS and workforce has our own databases; DHS utilizes CBMS and workforce utilizes Connecting Colorado. Both departments have been working together so that they are able to share certain information pertaining to their customers via the databases. CBMS and Connecting Colorado will pull information from each other Monday – Friday and the file will contain both Colorado Works and SNAP participants. Data that will interface into Connecting Colorado will be; Demographic information, Address and Email information, Employer information and Barrier information. When a CBMS client is enrolled in one of the Connecting Colorado programs, the program and enrollment date will be added to the CBMS case automatically and when the CBMS client is terminated from the Connecting Colorado program, the date the client exited the program will be added to the CBMS case automatically.

As mentioned in the previous question, there will be an increased focus on creating a coordinated triage system between workforce and vocational rehabilitation. The lessons learned from using a hotline and chat option for unemployment insurance recipients at the workforce center can be applied to other system partnerships. One strategy will be to increase virtual presence of agencies in partnership - sharing costs for teleconferencing and video technology between agencies will increase customer satisfaction. This would also help with providing services, workshops, and case management to clients when weather becomes a barrier to travel.

- 13. Briefly describe the activities and steps taken to develop this regional plan.**

This regional plan is the result of a variety of outreach and planning efforts, beginning in January 2016 and continuing through May. The focus of the effort has been to improve our

understanding of the changing regional economic conditions, particularly identifying those that have created new areas of growth and opportunity in a variety of sectors and occupations.

We kicked off the regional planning effort with a statewide Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium planning meeting on January 19 with all of the regions and many of the local boards and officials present. Additionally, our consultants were invited to meet all the key players and begin to set expectations for the breadth and depth of the regional plans. We reviewed and determined a new interlocal agreement should be executed for the area that would be consistent with WIOA and the consortium structure. We agreed the four Consortium plans would be launched in a staggered sequence, allowing us to ensure staff and consultant continuity, apply lessons learned from each workshop & fully exploit the statewide opportunity to secure specific feedback from the key impacted stakeholders and agencies. Specifically, this Southern region was identified to be the second of the four to host an event and begin detailed planning. The review and discussions were to take a five week process which leveraged a variety of engagement methods, including one-on-one interviews, telephone calls and other efforts to develop a rough plan that would accommodate the regional differences across the consortium.

Our regional leadership then invited and convened over 25 core partners to begin developing a robust local strategic plan. We facilitated a discussion of distinguished and influential local leaders representing significant cross-sections of our WIOA stakeholders. This includes a variety of regional Community Colleges, mandatory One-Stop partners, including State Human Services, Adult Education, Corrections, Veterans, Vocational Rehabilitation, as well as key Private Sector employers. A variety of other key leaders including Local Elected Officials from the region were invited to attend the planning workshop on February 11th and February 12th. Feedback on the facilitated session was extremely positive.

In the workshop, we developed a vision of how the system will ideally function in our local area to best meet WIOA goals and the needs of your employers and jobseekers. We confirmed with our WIB to ensure an actionable plan with a shared vision and delivery of services.

Taking advantage of several sets of detailed notes & responses to some initial follow up questions, we then assembled a first draft response to each of the 14 sections highlighted in this document. This document has since been posted to a shared Google Folder with the appropriate permissions to easily track comments, and changes over a five-week review and editing process. This timeline essentially reflected a schedule of one week for document prep, securing Regional Director approval of the first draft, then opening (for two weeks) this draft to a variety of participants who had agreed in the workshop to help draft and comment on the successive versions of the plan. In particular, we tried to identify the right skillset and experience to comment on each section. To that end, we collaborated with one-stop partners to ensure they had editorial control over the document for those two weeks, ensuring we had ample time to integrate additional commentary before releasing for public comment. For example, we sought to have specific details around Vocational Rehabilitation reviewed by the state leads for these programs in the area. This ensures our plan and supporting strategies are aligned with the local needs and preferences.

14. Describe the process used by the local boards in this planning region to provide an opportunity for public comment, including comment by representatives of

businesses and comment by representatives of labor organizations, and input into the development of the plan prior to its submission.

As previously mentioned, the process includes a two-week period of public comment, which includes representatives of businesses and labor organizations. The process began by including the individuals and agencies that were present at the regional planning meeting. At the meeting, workforce center staff also collected contact information for other key business and labor representatives to connect with to review the plan. In addition, all Workforce Development Board members and Local Elected Officials from the region will be invited to review and provide feedback to this plan.